



Elevating the Leadership of Students and Families with Lived Expertise



About NCHE

NCHE operates the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program.

- Website: <http://nche.ed.gov>
- Helpline: 800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org
- Products: <https://nche.ed.gov/resources/>
- Webinars: <https://nche.ed.gov/group-training/>
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Today's Presenter



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Agenda

- High-level overview of dynamics of family and youth homelessness
- Authentic engagement of families and youth with lived expertise vs. tokenism
- Seven principles of “Nothing About Us Without Us”
- Youth-specific considerations

Understanding Homelessness

- Homelessness is a system failure, not an individual fault
- Homelessness is a complex issue with a variety of factors leading to loss of housing
 - Systemic Causes (such as affordable housing shortages, housing discrimination)
 - Personal Crises (such as domestic violence, job loss, medical expenses)



A Persistent Risk

- Many Americans are at risk of losing their housing
- 22% of US adults have no emergency savings
- 36% of Americans have more credit card debt than savings
- 52% of Americans could not survive for more than three months on their current savings



Unchangeable Histories

- In addition to present day challenges, there are events, practices and policies from the past that contribute to current inequities
 - Government programs to build home and land ownership often excluded parts of the US population (for example, [redlining](#))
 - Disproportionate contact with government systems can increase a person's risk for losing their housing
 - The [carceral system](#)
 - [Child welfare](#) involvement

The Value of Lived Expertise

- Youth and families are the experts in their own lives
 - Detailed knowledge of the impact of the homelessness system
 - Knowledge of impact of the education system
 - Provider views of services and client experience may differ
 - Voices of Youth Count found that 2/3 of youth providers stated that they provided educational resources and guidance, but only one in five youth served by these same organizations stated that they received information on education from their providers



Authentic Engagement vs. Tokenism

- Paid expertise vs. advisory roles
- Leadership development
- Voting/veto authority



Nothing About Us Without Us

- Seven Principles
- Developed in Canada by individuals with lived expertise of homelessness, as well as researchers, policy makers, and service providers
- Used in the housing field

Nothing About Us Without Us: Seven Principles for Leadership and Inclusion of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness



Nothing about us without us:
Seven principles for leadership & inclusion
of people with lived experience
of homelessness

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

During the 2014 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in Vancouver, a group of individuals came together with a common goal: to ensure that individuals with lived experience received equitable representation from service providers, researchers, policy makers, and others, so that they can better understand and tackle the problem of homelessness.

We believe that without including individuals with lived experience in the decision making process, in research, and in all other endeavours, it creates an unbalanced approach to ending homelessness in Canada.

To that end, our council was formed. Our first action was to articulate principles for the inclusion and leadership of people with lived experience in organizations and initiatives that aim to address homelessness. We presented these principles to the conference plenary under the banner, "Nothing About Us Without Us."

These principles point to the importance of first voice inclusion in all endeavours to end homelessness. This is true of any social issue - the people who are living it usually have the best understanding about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it. Inclusion is especially vital in the context of homelessness, though, because being excluded and silenced is a huge part of the experience of homelessness and poverty. The belief that people who are homeless do not have the competence to participate as equals in organizations is layered on top of the other stereotypes directed at us because of racism, sexism, ableism, poor-bashing, and other oppressions.

Many organizations are learning to value lived expertise, but overcoming outdated, automatic beliefs and practices doesn't happen overnight. Service providers, researchers and policy-makers need to work alongside people with lived experience to create new structures in which we come together as equals. We hope this document can provide support to professionals and people with lived experience as we all work together to plan and implement these changes.

8 NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US
SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR LEADERSHIP & INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

The Principles

- Bring the perspective of lived expertise to the forefront
- Include people with lived experience at all levels
- Value their time and provide appropriate supports
- Challenge stigma and promote dignity
- Recognize expertise and engage in decision making
- Work together toward equitable representation
- Build authentic relationships between people with and without lived experience

Principle One

Bring the perspective of lived experience to the forefront

- Ensure that communications do not reinforce misconceptions of individual fault, or that homelessness can be solved by charity
- Allow people with lived expertise (PLE) to speak for themselves



Principle Two

Include people with lived experience at all levels

- PLE can serve in all roles, from event volunteers, to members of committees taking specific action steps, to board chairs, to paid employees
- A word about white dominant culture and ideas of “professionalism”
 - Credentials do not necessarily equal skill or knowledge
 - What is seen as professional dress or language is culturally-specific and can be exclusionary to members of certain ethnic groups or socio-economic classes

Principle Three

Value their time and provide appropriate supports

- Compensation
 - Most of the time when educators, service providers, and other professionals are working to support and improve services for those experiencing housing instability, we are being paid for our time
 - PLE should also be paid for their time as individuals with unique knowledge and expertise
 - Suggested minimum compensation is the hourly wage for Fair Market Rent in your community, but compensation comparable to other experts is recommended
 - Payment should be made in cash equivalents rather than gift cards

Principle Three (cont.)

- Training and Capacity Building
 - Bureaucratic systems and procedures can be confusing – for everyone!
 - Provide training and support for all members of working groups
 - How will meetings be structured
 - How will decisions be made
 - What will be the common terms and acronyms used
 - Develop shared agreements for work time



Principle Three (cont.)

- Recognition of, and support for, emotional labor
 - Trauma-responsive training for all members of workgroups and committees
 - Counseling/case-worker support and debriefing after meetings
- Timelines should include adequate space for relationship and trust building



Principle Three (cont.)

- Childcare
 - Childcare is expensive and can create a barrier to participation
 - Providing safe, no-cost childcare for meetings and events can reduce this barrier
- Transportation Assistance
 - In the same way that families and youth may need transportation support to attend school, transportation assistance may be needed to actively and consistently participate in meetings and events



Principle Four

Challenge stigma and promote dignity

- EHCY programs are required to conduct periodic review of system policies to reduce barriers
- This practice can be extended to reviewing the policies, practices, and procedures of various activities and working groups within the EHCY program
 - Provide training for staff, volunteers, board members, etc. on dynamics and causes of homelessness
 - Ensure people-first language and practices
 - Work to identify systems of oppression (adultism, sexism, racism) at play in EHCY programming and address them

Principle Five

Recognize expertise and engage in decision making

- Many times PLE are brought in after a document has been drafted or a decision has been made to provide a stamp of approval
- When elevating the leadership of PLE, families and youth are present from the beginning of a process and serve as co-creators
- The ideas of PLE are incorporated into the finished product/procedure

Principle Six

Work together toward equitable representation

- This is a process that may take time
- Strive toward representation consistent with your EHCY population on boards and committees
- Ensure no one individual is tasked with being the sole representative of their community
- It may be helpful to identify other organizations that have been successful and seek their support and guidance

Principle Seven

Build authentic relationships between people with and without lived experience

- Work to build welcoming environments for all participants
- Make sure no person or group is excluded from meetings, events, or social activities
- Make time to celebrate and share achievements made by working groups



Authentic Youth Collaboration

Working to build trust with youth and young adults (YYA) through meaningful engagement, recognizing and promoting their autonomy and communicating with transparency and honesty.



Adultism



Adultism describes the systems of privileged attitudes and behaviors that adults **have over those of young people**. We sometimes see this playout when youth and young adults are stereotyped and discriminated against based on age.

Adultism is driven by behaviors and attitudes that are based on the assumption that adults are **better than young people** and, therefore, entitles them to act upon or on behalf of young people without their agreement.

Calling out adultism wherever it shows up in working with young people is **necessary for authentic youth collaboration**, as it permeates housing and our culture.



Ageism vs. Adultism



Ageism

Ageism describes the systems of privileged attitudes and behaviors that young people have over elders.

EXAMPLE

Denied a job because of the assumption that they won't be able to produce as much as someone younger

Adultism

Adultism describes the systems of privileged attitudes and behaviors that adults have over those of young people.

EXAMPLE

Denied a job because of the assumption that young people are irresponsible



Adultism in Common Language



- Respect your elders- they know better
- Older & wiser
- Childish
- Immature
- Too young/Not old enough
- Children should be seen and not heard
- The more you live, the more you know



The Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

- The *Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program* ([YHDP](#)) is a national initiative designed to reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness. Through grants to communities throughout the country, YHDP supports the development and implementation of a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness with a focus on unaccompanied youth.
- A key principle and requirement of YHDP is establishing a *Youth Action Board* (YAB) made up of young people with lived experience of homelessness. Youth have a key role at all tables in the process and are granted authority to approve subgrants of federal funds for youth services.

Examples of the Principles in Action

- Scheduling meetings at the times and places most convenient for youth, rather than school staff
 - *Example:* Scheduling meetings in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate students and families allowing them to work or participate in extracurricular activities
- Scheduling listening sessions where service providers... listen
 - *Example:* YHDP communities often hold listening sessions where only young people are allowed to speak. Young people share about their experiences in the system and priorities for change, while adults listen in silence. Afterwards, adults participate in a facilitated debrief separate from the YYA.

Examples (cont.)

- **Giving additional weight to PLE voices**
 - *Example:* Giving YYA additional votes in a ranking process
 - *Example:* Giving PLE veto power in important decisions
- **Taking on leadership and facilitation roles**
 - *Example:* A young person chairing a community's cross-systems committee to increase access and educational supports for youth experiencing homelessness. The committee included city officials, the SEA EHCY state coordinator, service providers, and school administrators. The young person set agendas, facilitated meetings, and managed communication.

Examples (cont.)

- Participation in staffing, and hiring and selection of CBO partners
 - *Example:* In some YHDP communities YYA assist in development of job descriptions and interview questions for staff who will be working with youth, participate in interviews, develop scoring metrics, and otherwise assist in the selection of staff in the homeless program.
 - *Example:* In YHDP YABs participate in development of RFPs and selection of local service providers and CBOs. Youth-crafted selection processes often include site visits to prospective community partners, review of CBO staff compensation, and youth approval of contracts.

Examples (cont.)

- **Providing training to staff**
 - *Example:* Youth assisting with and delivering training to adult partners on the EHCY Program, equity or other topics (not to be confused with being asked to share personal stories and experiences)
- **Participation in evaluation of the EHCY program**
 - *Example:* PLE assist in developing and implementing a Continuous Quality Improvement process (e.g., thinking about how to measure the progress and success of an initiative or the overall program)

Additional Resources

Issue Briefs

- Incorporating Education into Coordinated Community Responses to Youth and Young Adult Homelessness: Lessons Learned from the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program
- NW Michigan and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program: Working with Education Partners in Rural Communities to Serve Youth Experiencing Homelessness





**THANK
YOU!**